

HONORING THE LIFE OF SPECIALIST ROBERT J. TAUTERIS, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. RIBBLE). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. DONNELLY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DONNELLY of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to solemnly remember and honor the life and dedicated service of Specialist Robert Tauteris, Jr., a native son of Hamlet, Indiana, and a proud member of the 713th Engineer Company based in Valparaiso and assigned to 81st Troop Command.

Specialist Tauteris died, along with three of his fellow soldiers, on January 5, 2012, in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained when their vehicle was hit by a roadside improvised explosive device as they scouted for bombs and potential problems along a major supply route.

The State of Indiana mourns the loss of the four brave men who took on this dangerous mission to ensure the safety of their fellow soldiers. Specialist Tauteris died, along with his fellow National Guardsmen, Specialist Brian Leonhardt, Specialist Christopher Patterson, and Staff Sergeant Jonathan Metzger. Private Douglas Rachowicz was severely injured in the same incident.

Robert graduated from North Judson High School in 1986 and had worked in manufacturing at Ferro Corporation in Plymouth. Robert Tauteris served one tour in Afghanistan with the National Guard and volunteered for his second deployment when his son, Robert Tauteris III enlisted. Father and son left together for Afghanistan in the fall of 2011. Bobby III accompanied his dad's body home to Dover Air Force Base.

Robert's posthumous awards include the Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the Army Achievement Medal. He also earned the National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal with the Bronze Service Star, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with M Device, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, the NATO Medal, Combat Action Badge, Driver and Mechanic Badge, Combat and Special Skill Badge, Basic Marksmanship Qualification Badge, and the Overseas Service Bar. It is an extraordinary record, and he is an extraordinary hero.

Robert will be remembered by his friends, his family, and fellow soldiers as a dedicated, reliable, hardworking man who cared deeply for his family. He is survived by his sons, Robert III and Matthew; Robert III's wife, Kayla—and they are here with us today—his dad, Robert Tauteris; his sister, Tammy Tauteris Smith; brother, Tom; half-brother, Darrel Ray Minix; and stepmother, Nichelle; as well as extended family and friends who are left to treasure his memory.

It is my solemn duty and humble privilege to honor the life, the service,

and the memory of Specialist Robert Tauteris, Jr. He is a testament to the great honor possessed and sacrifices made by our men and women in the Armed Forces. We mourn his passing and offer solemn gratitude for his service and sacrifice.

On behalf of the United States of America, we want to thank your family for your service, for your sacrifice, and for everything you have done. God bless you.

REFORMS TO THE MEDICARE SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. FITZPATRICK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on behalf of the senior citizens in Pennsylvania's Eighth Congressional District who rely on a Medicare system which makes predictable and stable payments to their physicians.

I came to Washington, with one of the largest freshman classes in recent history, to make the difficult decisions that for too long have been deferred and delayed. I'm proud to have joined a bipartisan group of my fellow Representatives last spring in passing a budget resolution which addressed the long-term challenges facing Medicare.

The budget resolution we supported provides fiscal stability to a program which will face severe cuts and drastic changes in the future without serious reform. However, while these basic reforms to the existing system are being debated, we are currently faced with a more pressing issue, the solution to which has already earned widespread support among lawmakers, doctors, and health care industry groups.

The practicality of the sustainable growth formula for Medicare payments has been a subject of much debate in this Chamber since its implementation in 1997. Over the course of the past two decades, Congress has deemed it acceptable to provide for short-term, temporary fixes to ensure that doctors receive adequate payment for the services they provide to Medicare patients. Short-term fixes provide no stability or predictability to these important service providers.

In speaking with a cardiologist in my home of Bucks County, he shared his concerns with me over the way Congress has chosen to handle the SGR. He told me that every time a short-term extension comes up for a vote, he is faced with the possibility of having to lay off employees and reducing his practice in the face of potential cuts.

The constant threat of cuts to the Medicare reimbursement rate prevents doctors and hospitals from developing new delivery and payment models intended to reduce rising health care costs and denies them the flexibility they need to achieve savings through improved care.

Each time Congress enacts a short-term fix, the scheduled cuts in the SGR

formula grow deeper and the cost of a full repeal increases. A full repeal in 2005 would have cost less than \$50 billion. Today's cost is upwards of \$300 billion. In the next 5 years, if nothing is done to correct this predictable crisis, the cost of short-term fixes and the total debt accumulated from the SGR will climb to over \$600 billion.

With the drawdown of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the homecoming of many of the brave young men and women who so proudly served our country in those theaters over the course of the past decade, we are presented with a unique opportunity to provide for a permanent fix to the Medicare physician payments, and to do so without adding to our already burdensome national debt. The use of savings from the Overseas Contingency Operations fund to permanently repeal the SGR formula will provide doctors and their patients with the certainty they so desperately need in these difficult economic times.

As with so many of the challenges facing our Nation today, we are presented with two clear options:

We can choose to ignore the problems posed by the SGR formula to doctors, seniors, and to our fiscal health by continuing the practice of short-term fixes and forced draconian cuts to hospitals and health care providers and apply the savings from the OCO funds elsewhere; or

We can choose to use these funds to permanently repeal the SGR and to set our Medicare system on a new path and provide for long-term stability for doctors that promote equality, efficiency, and improved health care services for our Nation's seniors.

I understand that we're presented with another opportunity to provide some breathing room for doctors and their patients as part of the middle class tax cut bill that looks to achieve bipartisan support here this week. Let us use the next 10 months to engage in some honest discussion about the real cost and impact of the SGR. Let's get this right before the end of the year. And I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to do just that.

BRING THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN TO AN END

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Speaker, first let me just thank my colleagues, Congressman JONES, Congressman McDERMOTT, Congressman ELLISON and others, for speaking out this morning clearly, saying that it's past time to bring the war in Afghanistan to a swift and orderly end.

There's no military solution in Afghanistan. We need to bring our troops home now, and we need to make sure that we leave no permanent military bases. The American people are sick and tired of the past decade of war, and they want this war to end.